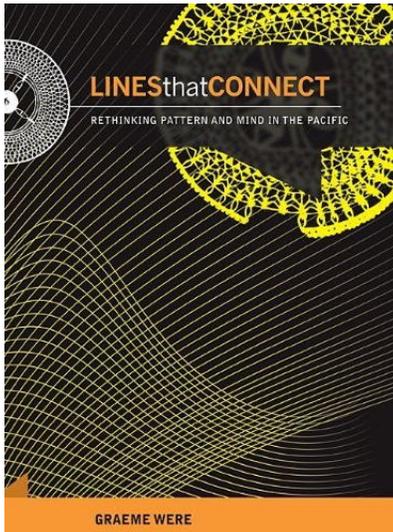


Behind the Scenes of... Lines that Connect : Rethinking Pattern and Mind in the Pacific

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The aim of this blog piece is to furnish Material World readers with a background to my latest book - *Lines that Connect: Rethinking Pattern and Mind in the Pacific*. Rather than raise any commentary about its merits or shortfalls (which I leave to someone else), I thought it would be interesting to discuss the publication in relation to my own intellectual background.

To begin then, the book is a kind of homage, on the one hand, to C P Snow's *Two Cultures*; and on the other, to Owen Jones and his seminal text *The Grammar of Ornament*. These two works, unwittingly, seem to reflect tensions in my own abilities torn between the sciences and the arts. At secondary school, I possessed a strong interest in practical physics (we got to take Nuffield Physics 'O' level) and mathematics (again, applied). But my talents were also directed to painting and technical drawing [I remember once coming first at art, the winning painting a composition of my neighbours house].

Strangely, this split between the arts and the sciences followed me through to sixth-form college and then on to my first degree at Keele University where I took a Foundation Year (or FY) followed by a joint degree in social anthropology and mathematics. I was to be the first and only student ever to choose this combination. The structure of the degree programme at Keele was such that we had to take subsidiary courses to the main degree programme: I duly chose Astronomy – calculating crater sizes on the moon measuring shadows on lunar surfaces using photographs [for which I got a distinction and £10 book token]; and additional passes in Psychology [can't remember what we did] and Philosophy [walking around with Existentialism & Humanism in my jacket pocket].

Some six years after graduating, this split would surface again when I took on a post at the

Horniman Museum, working with ethnographic collections and exhibitions. There, I learnt practical skills of working with objects – handling, assessment, storage, and transportation – and exhibition design. I was involved with the re-display of the collections in the now, Africa Worlds and Centenary Gallery. It was during this period of employment that I first became acquainted with the kapkap – the clam- and turtle-shell breastplate famously represented in Melanesian museum collections. In particular, the symmetrical arrangement of designs carved into its surface reminded me of my mathematics classes; and so, when I returned to take up a Masters degree, the kapkap became the focus of my research thesis, and then a PhD...

This vignette of my arts and sciences education [the successes, of course] has tried to portray the tension I have felt accommodating two diverse intellectual disciplines. This, I believe, is a tension that runs throughout the *Lines that Connect* book. On the one hand, I try to analyse the patterns that are reproduced on the kapkap in the Pacific using mathematical analysis (something common amongst some anthropologists in the 1970s), while also thinking about their ideas and associations in the process of their articulation. The book itself treats pattern as a kind of meta-media, examining pattern's mobility as it surfaces in various forms. It takes the reader through several areas of my work in the Pacific: from kapkap production and display, to Christianity and Baha'i faith in New Ireland (PNG), and on to pattern, mobility and transformation in the wider Pacific. Owen Jones' work very much inspired the book as his engagement with pattern on Pacific ethnographic artefacts was situated very much in terms of his appreciation of their technical virtuosity and mindfulness rather than a negative view that later 19th century social evolutionary theorists attributed to such designs. And in retrospect, I suppose the book provides a good example of how the arts and sciences can be brought together to mutually reinforce one another, which C P Snow may be proud of.

The book is available on [Amazon](#) or directly through [University Hawaii Press](#).